

REMARKS

The Examiner is thanked for the careful examination of the application and for the suggestions for amending the application.

Drawings:

The drawings are amended as suggested by the examiner, and taking into account the amendments to the independent claims. Accordingly, the examiner is requested to reconsider and withdraw the outstanding objections to the drawings.

35 USC 112 Rejections:

Applicant submits that there is adequate support for the claims as submitted. See, e.g., paragraphs [0111] and [0132]. However, in order to expedite prosecution, the claims have been amended to remove the "at least one of..." language.

Art Rejections:

Claims 1-3 and 6-10 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Aruga in view of Sakai. The Examiner admits that Aruga does not teach more than one return carry line. For this deficiency, the examiner relies on Sakai, alleging that Sakai teaches a process system with at least two branched carry lines with two parallel return lines. The Office Action does not indicate what portions of Sakai disclose the at least two branched carry lines with two parallel return lines. Applicant assumes that the Office Action is referring to the solid lines, the one-dot, one-dash lines, and the two-dot, one-dash lines, as allegedly teaching such parallel lines.

However, the solid lines, the one-dot, one-dash lines, and the two-dot, one-dash lines of Sakai do not define separate paths each extending through a plurality of processing chambers. The solid lines, the one-dot, one-dash lines, and the two-

dot, one-dash lines all refer to the same path over which the semiconductor W is transported. And, as for the return lines in Sakai, none of them pass through a plurality of processing chambers. Accordingly, Sakai does not overcome the deficiency of the prior art with regard to the now amended claims. Specifically, the now amended claims define two return carry lines wherein each of the carry lines has a different path and each of the return carry lines passes through a plurality of the vacuum processing chambers. Accordingly, the amended claims should now be patentable over the applied prior art of Aruga and Sakai.

Claims 11-15 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takahashi in view of Sakai. The Examiner admits that Takahashi does not teach more than one return carry line. For this deficiency, the examiner relies on Sakai, alleging that Sakai teaches a process system with at least two branched carry lines with two parallel return lines.

However, the solid lines, the one-dot, one-dash lines, and the two-dot, one-dash lines of Sakai do not define separate paths each extending through a plurality of processing chambers. The solid lines, the one-dot, one-dash lines, and the two-dot, one-dash lines all refer to the same path over which the semiconductor W is transported. And, as for the return lines in Sakai, none of them pass through a plurality of processing chambers. Accordingly, Sakai does not overcome the deficiency of the prior art with regard to the now amended claims. Specifically, the now amended claims define two return carry lines wherein each of the carry lines has a different path and each of the return carry lines passes through a plurality of the vacuum processing chambers. Accordingly, the amended claims should now be patentable over the applied prior art of Takahashi and Sakai.

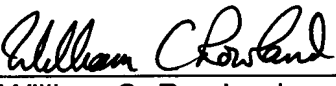
The rejection of claims 4 and 5 should be withdrawn for the same reasons.

In the event that there are any questions concerning this amendment, or the application in general, the Examiner is respectfully urged to telephone the undersigned attorney so that prosecution of the application may be expedited.

Respectfully submitted,

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